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ABSTRACT

A study examined the changing conceptions about the writing instruction of three teachers who participated in the Teachers College Writing Project. Three New York City elementary school teachers were selected from a larger sample of 10 teachers who participated in a larger study of the same project. The teachers were selected because they had incorporated at least some of the strategies of the Writing Project into their teaching. Teachers participated in interviews three times over a 2-year period. Results indicated that all three teachers changed their ideas about the teacher-student relationship, the goals and purposes of writing, and their pedagogy in ways that were consistent with the Writing Project philosophy. However, influenced by their prior experiences with writing instruction, the teachers changed in different ways and to different degrees. Findings support the effectiveness of a particular staff development project, while demonstrating differences in teachers' understandings. (Thirty references are attached.) (Author/RS)

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Research Report 92-3

Teachers' Changing Conceptions of Writing Instruction

Sarah J. McCarthey

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The NCRTL is committed to research that will contribute to the improvement of teacher education and teacher learning. To further its mission, the NCRTL publishes research reports, issue papers, technical series, conference proceedings, and special reports on contemporary issues in teacher education. For more information about the NCRTL or to be placed on its mailing list, please write to the Editor, National Center for Research on Teacher Learning, 116 Erickson Hall, Michigan State University, East Lansing, Michigan 48824-1034.

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Abstract

This paper explores the changing conceptions about writing instruction of three teachers who participated in the Teachers College Writing Project. Using research methods drawing from interpretive/qualitative assumptions, the researcher found that all three teachers changed their ideas about the teacher-student relationship, the goals and purposes of writing, and their pedagogy in ways that were consistent with the Writing Project philosophy. However, influenced by their prior experiences with writing instruction, teachers changed in different ways and to different degrees. The cases presented lend support to the effectiveness of a particular staff development project, while demonstrating differences in teachers' understandings.

Teachers' Changing Conceptions of Writing Instruction[1]

Sarah J. McCarthey[2]

In the 1970s a shift in the dominant theory of writing instruction began, away from a focus on the written product and form of writing toward an emphasis on the writing process in all of its complexity (Freedman, Dyson, Flower, & Chafe, 1987). Several overlapping but distinct definitions and theories of process writing arising from cognitive, social constructivist, and naturalistic frameworks have evolved. For instance, Hayes and Flower (1980; 1986) have seen writing as a goal-directed cognitive activity involving planning, translating, and reviewing that requires rhetorical knowledge, subject matter knowledge, and strategic knowledge.

Other researchers emphasize writing as a social activity associated with particular practices (Bruffee, 1984; Freedman, Dyson, Flower, & Chafe, 1987; Scribner & Cole, 1981). As a social process, the features of audience and purpose are highlighted. Shaunessey (1977) sees composing as a socialization process in which the writer brings his/her thinking in line with discourse conventions of the community of readers. Nystrand (1989) argues in a similar way that writing is a social interactive process between readers and writers within discourse communities. Educators and researchers from a more naturalistic tradition see writing as a natural process that can be activated by encouraging environments (e.g., Emig, 1981). Graves (1983) and Calkins (1986) also see the establishment of a literate environment as crucial to teaching students how to express themselves.

Although these theories of writing and their links to process approaches dominate the literature, a gap remains between the theories and how they are enacted in classrooms (Applebee, 1986). Applebee found that writing was used primarily to assess learning, that prewriting activities constituted a minimum amount of time, and that peer response groups occurred in only a minority of classrooms. District-wide writing tests, minimal support for instructional innovation, and system-wide pressure for improving achievement tests scores are some of the reasons researchers have suggested for the difficulties of changing classroom norms that would support process approaches (Florio-Ruane, 1991; Michaels, 1987; Ulichney & Watson-Gegeo, 1989).

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[1]A version of this paper was presented at the American Educational Research Association, Boston, April 1990.

[2]Sarah J. McCarthey, an assistant professor of language and literature in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction at the University of Texas at Austin, was a research assistant with the National Center for Research on Teacher Learning. The author wishes to thank Sue McMahon and Michelle Parker for their helpful comments on earlier drafts of this paper.

Additionally, teachers' views about writing may play a role in how they implement writing programs within classrooms similar to the relationship between teachers' stated beliefs about the reading process and their classroom practices (Richardson, Anders, Tidwell, & Lloyd, 1991). If teachers hold traditional views of writing as consisting of appropriate syntax, grammatical structures, and other conventions, it is unlikely that they will embrace and implement a process approach. The learning-to-teach literature suggests that the focus of change ought to be on teachers' cognitions and thought processes rather than behaviors (Elbaz, 1983; Leinhardt, 1988; Richardson, 1990; Schon, 1982). The purpose of this study was to identify teachers' conceptions of writing and writing instruction and link those conceptions to program influences.

This study examined a particular staff development program (the Teachers College Writing Project) and its influence upon teachers' conceptions of writing over time. The site was one of 11 sites studied by the National Center for Research on Teacher Education (NCRTE) which conducted a longitudinal study of how teachers learn to teach math and writing to diverse learners. The research questions that guided the study were (1) How do teachers' conceptions of writing instruction change over time? In particular, how do teachers' conceptions of the teacher-student relationship, goals for writing, and pedagogy change? and (2) How does a particular staff development program influence teachers' conceptions of writing instruction?

The Teachers College Writing Project site lent itself well to the study because it embodies a particular philosophy of writing, a naturalistic perspective toward the development of writing. Additionally, the Project reflects the learning-to-teach literature (e.g, Ball & Feiman-Nemser, 1988; Borko & Livingston, 1989; Tabachnick & Zeichner, 1984) which suggests that the focus of change should be teachers' cognitions and thought processes in addition to behavior. The Writing Project, shaped by a particular orientation toward writing, provides specific tools and ideas for teachers to work with children. Thus, it brings together a philosophy and specific tools.

Writing is assumed to be purposeful in the Teachers College Writing Project; students should be involved in what real authors do, including choosing their own topics to write about, recording their ideas, and making plans. The Writing Project emphasizes introducing children to different genres of literature and providing anecdotes about authors to provide models for students' own writing. Writing is considered a process of drafting ideas, revising and rethinking, sharing the drafts with others, and editing for publication. Very young children are involved in the process of writing through drawing pictures and labelling those pictures; the project encourages invented spelling and writing sounds as they are heard. The

major goals of the Project include getting students to communicate through writing, to become empowered through writing, and to develop an appreciation for literature (Calkins, 1986, 1991; NCRTE, 1987).

The role of the teacher is to provide time, materials, and space for students to gather to share their writing, and to create a predictable structure. The predictable structure consists of (a) the minilesson in which the teacher presents an idea about writing from procedures, to qualities of good writing, to examples from literature; (b) the writing time in which the students are writing and the teacher circulates to talk individually with students about their writing; and (c) the share session (often called "author's chair") in which several students read their work and other students respond. This visible structure is a vehicle for altering traditional classroom norms by getting teachers to interact daily with students about writing.

According to one of the trainers (NCRTE interview data), it is the "classroom ecology" that must change. The ecology includes changing the roles of both the students and the teacher so children have more control over their own learning. When working with students, the teachers are encouraged by the Project to listen to what the children have to say about their writing, to respond to the writers, and to extend what the children do—not to take control from the writers (Calkins, 1986; Calkins & Harwayne, 1987). Because the particular ways in which teachers respond to the students or extend their writing are relatively unspecified in the Project, different teachers may understand and use the ideas presented in various ways.

Method

The method of data collection and analysis for this study were consistent with interpretive/qualitative traditions of research (Erickson, 1986). Three teachers were selected from a larger sample of 10 teachers who participated in an NCTRE study of the Teachers College Writing Project, a coordinated effort between the New York City Pubic Schools and Teachers College at Columbia University.

The participants in the study were three elementary New York City teachers, two from one school and one from a second school, who participated in the Writing Project. These three teachers were selected because they had incorporated at least some of the strategies of the Writing Project into their teaching. For instance, they had been observed implementing the structure of the writing workshop that included daily writing time for (a) minilessons, (b) teacher-student writing conferences, and (c) share time. They also provide interesting comparisons in the ways in which they understood and developed the ideas of

the Writing Project and in the kinds and degree of change in their conceptions of writing and writing instruction. A complete set of longitudinal interview data was also available on each of the three teachers.

All three teachers had participated in extensive training by workshop personnel. The training consisted of two major parts: (a) ongoing workshops offered by Lucy Calkins, the program director, and others at Teachers College, and (b) on-site training in which writers or teacher-trainers worked with students and teachers within the classroom context. The workshops were offered in three different formats: (a) the Summer Institute, an intensive two-week workshop; (b) triannual Saturday workshops; and (c) 10-12 half-day workshops throughout the year.

In the workshops, teachers engaged in writing themselves and responded to the writing of peers; watched videotapes of trainers and students; and engaged in activities such as role-playing and discussing ways to teach writing in their classrooms. For instance, teachers might be asked to make a written time line of their growth as a writer, selecting important incidents and expanding upon those. Peers responded to the writing and shared their own experiences. After watching examples of one of the trainers conducting different types of writing conferences with students on a video, teachers categorized the conferences as either content or process conferences. Then, teachers divided into pairs to practice conferences with one another. Throughout these workshops, the focus was on (a) changing the teacher-student relationship to reflect student ownership of writing, (b) developing goals for writing such as making it purposeful by helping children select meaningful topics, and (c) emphasizing the content of students' writing rather than mechanics and grammar.

The on-site training consisted of (a) a "launch" in which the teacher-trainer modeled the writing process in a classroom with students while several teachers watched and (b) five to seven weekly follow-up visits in which the teacher and trainer worked together in making the transition to workshop instruction (Calkins & Harwayne, 1987; NCRTE, 1987). In the launch and the follow-up visits, the trainer read literature, discussed qualities of good writing, and responded to students' writing in conferences. For example, in a one-hour, follow-up visit a trainer read *Hansel and Gretel* to a group of students and modelled a description of the witch. Next she explained to the students that she was going to write about a family member who was very important to her; she closed her eyes and described this person.

Then, in groups of three, students discussed three important people in their lives. They closed their eyes and were asked to visualize one of these important persons. Students then went back to their seats and wrote their descriptions. While the students wrote, the

trainer conducted conferences with a student, then conducted a conference with the participating teacher about the strategies she had used with the child. The trainer modelled for the teacher by actually interacting with children and discussed her strategies afterward.

Erica.[3] Erica was a fifth-grade teacher, beginning her second year in a public school in New York City. She had been an anthropology and education major in college. Having taught for four years before coming to her present situation, Erica became involved in the Writing Project because she liked new ideas and had seen children's writing displayed in the halls of her present school. Although Erica did not enjoy teaching language arts previously, she considered herself a writer and often wrote letters and poems. Erica had no previous experience with the Writing Project prior to the fall in which the study began.

Elma. Elma taught sixth grade in a New York City classroom. She was an experienced elementary teacher, having taught for 14 years. She took the Summer Institute the summer before data collection began. She had engaged students in writing before taking the Workshop but had what she called a more structured approach to writing than that advocated by the Writing Project. She did not do extensive writing on her own, writing an occasional letter or poetry on a special occasion. She, however, enjoyed the satisfaction of producing something she thought was good.

Emily. Emily was a first-grade teacher who was beginning her third year of teaching in her present school in New York City. Prior to teaching first grade, she had taught creative dramatics, English literature to junior high and high school students, and improvisational theater to a variety of age levels in different settings for a total of 12 years. She enjoyed teaching literature and language arts to young children and had students write a play the previous year. Emily did writing herself related to school and personal writing, for example, she wrote ongoing reports of students, kept a personal journal, and wrote short stories. She had taken an overview course on the Writing Project four years before participation in the Summer Institute which she attended the summer before data collection began.

Sources of Data

A two-hour, semistructured interview constituted the main source of data. This interview was developed by NCRTE to probe teachers' understandings of subject matter, pedagogy, the learner, and the curriculum across the 11 sites. Three major sections selected from the longer interview comprise the data source for this study: (a) Section A focuses

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[3]Names of teachers are pseudonyms.

on personal history and orientations of the teacher; (b) Section D emphasizes teacher knowledge and beliefs about particular aspects of writing; and (c) Section E focuses on organization of writing.

For the purposes of this study, the researcher selected questions from Section A that focused on the teacher's views about the goals of writing. The teacher was asked to respond to a scenario in which the principal comes in at the beginning of the year to ask about her goals for writing. From Section D, the following questions were selected: (a) The one that asks the teacher about what she would do if a third grader had trouble with apostrophes; (b) the one about the scenario in which the teacher is asked to respond to a text written by a third grader, Jessie, containing many spelling and punctuation errors; and (c) the one asking the teacher to explain what she would do if a child asked her if he should use the grammatical construction "is" or "are" in a particular sentence. Section E questions included (a) one on what is important about organization and (b) a series of questions asking the teacher to respond to an expository text, lacking organization and written by a fourth grader, about dolphins and fish.

All of the interview questions contained follow-up probes about the subject matter, the learner, the curriculum, and pedagogical issues (see Appendix). These questions were selected because they represented some of the larger issues associated with improving writing (e.g., goals, narrative, grammar, spelling and punctuation, and organization). Only a subset of the data was analyzed because of the length of the interviews; these data were most relevant to the questions asked in this study.

The teachers participated in the interview three times over the course of a two-year period: the Fall of 1987 (referred to as Wave 1); Spring of 1988 (referred to as Wave 2); and the following Winter of 1989 (referred to as Wave 3). The interview provides systematic longitudinal data; all of the questions selected for the analysis were asked at each interval. All interviews were audiotaped and transcribed verbatim.

Other sources of data providing relevant background information about the goals of the Writing Project included two interviews with Lucy Calkins, program director, and her books: *The Art of Teaching Writing* (1986), *Lessons from a Child* (1983), and *The Writing Workshop: A World of Difference* (Calkins & Harwayne, 1987). Site descriptions from the Teachers College Writing Project, gathered from interviews and visits to the site, provided information about the goals and philosophy of the Project.

Analysis and Interpretation

Analysis of the data used a theoretical framework called "grounded theory" (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) in which the researcher analyzed the data inductively. First, the researcher read the complete data set from each interview of each teacher carefully several times. Second, she selected the questions to examine in detail based on their relevance to conceptions of writing instruction and whether or not these questions had been asked consistently throughout the three data collection points. Third, she constructed a grid similar to that suggested by Miles & Huberman (1984) for each teachers' responses to each of the questions over the three data points. The grid consisted of three key categories: (a) teacher-student relationship; (b) goals for writing instruction; and (c) pedagogy. Within each of these categories, certain features stood out. For instance, who had control of the writing was salient within the teacher-student relationship, while purposes of writing emerged as a key issue in goals. Issues of techniques such as using worksheets or using the student's own writing were highlighted under pedagogy.

Key ideas from the teachers' responses to each question were placed on the grid. Guided by the constant comparative method of qualitative analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), the researcher looked for patterns within the categories and compared the teachers' responses over the three waves to discern a developmental pattern for each teacher. Key quotations were chosen to represent the teacher's conceptions of writing and writing instruction at particular points in time and are included in the findings.

After comparing the responses to questions and integrating categories, the researcher generated a theory which then required testing against other data. The last part of the analysis consisted of comparing the three teachers to one another within each of the three categories. These comparisons were done inductively by comparing the responses of the teachers over time and understanding in what ways they differed from each other.

The Cases of Teacher Change

The three teachers' changes in their conceptions of writing and writing instruction may be characterized along three dimensions: (a) changes in the teacher-student relationship; (b) changes in goals for writing instruction; and (c) changes in pedagogy.

Changes in the Teacher-Student Relationship

An important aspect of the Writing Project was the focus on changing the nature of the teacher-student relationship. How did teachers' conceptions about the relationship change over time?

Erica. Erica's conceptions about the roles of the teacher and student changed significantly in the course of her involvement with the Writing Project. Prior to participation in the Project, Erica had her students do little writing. She had chosen the topics and occasionally assigned students writing projects. Consistent with this approach, Erica had seen her role in a traditional way with the teacher choosing topics and assigning them to students.

At the beginning of her involvement with the Project, Erica seemed to have a view of the teacher's role as arranging some interesting activities so that students would be willing to write. In Wave 1 she said, "You try to wheeze it out of them. . . . [I] try to make it more interesting than what it actually could be. Try to lure the children into something interesting." At this point in Erica's development, her role seemed to be that of a person who had to force or trick children into writing because writing was not inherently interesting. The role of the teacher was to try to make writing interesting so that children, almost without being aware of it, would agree to engage in writing.

By Wave 2, however, Erica's notion of the role of the teacher and the student had changed. At this point, she perceived the student as much more active; the role of the teacher was not to tell students what to do and how to write. Instead, she saw herself as a guide for students who were active learners. She said:

> I wouldn't want my students to be passive learners. I would want them to be active. I would like them to respond. I wouldn't want to tell them, tell them, tell them. I would want them to be inquisitive and to try to find out things for themselves. I would just basically guide them, to introduce to them different subjects, different lessons and for them to take on the learning or the questionings.

Whereas in Wave 1 Erica felt that she needed to lure students into writing, she wanted students to have some control over their own learning by being active and inquisitive in Wave 2. Her role shifted from a teacher who was in control of all the activities to the idea that a teacher ought to be more of a guide. In Wave 3, Erica extended her view that the students should have control over their own learning. The teacher's role was not to tell students what they ought to write, but rather to encourage students to find and develop their own ideas. Rather than the teacher imposing her own ideas, Erica said:

> We don't just tell them. . . . See, not to change the child's ideas because when you ask a child a question, they might feel that you're throwing [away] the

> whole idea that they intended to use . . . maybe that's not what the child intended as a writer to do.

Erica wanted students to be in control of the topics they wrote about, but also to be in control of what they really wanted to say, not writing what they thought the teacher wanted them to say. Erica further explained that teachers might ask a question that directs a child away from talking about what he or she wants to say.

Over the two years of her participation in the Project, Erica expressed her willingness to allow students to have control over their own work. As she gained experience in the Workshop, Erica focused on students as active learners while she exerted less control over students' writing. Erica changed from Wave 1 to Wave 3 in her views about who ought to be in control, recognizing the importance of the student's idea.

Elma. Unlike Erica who had not had students involved in much writing before her involvement in the Project, Elma discussed how writing had always been a part of her curriculum:

> Writing is something I have always done a lot of, poetry, a lot of poetry, a lot of creative writing, a lot of stories . . . and I have gotten pretty good results. . . . I've done a tremendous amount of writing but it's been basically, you know ideas that pop into my head, you know, we'll talk about snow, it's snowing, well, look it's beautiful, go write a poem about snow. What do you love and dislike about New York? We would read a story, turn it into a poem. It was really spontaneous kind of writing.

Elma was able to talk easily about the kind of writing she had involved children in and the ways in which she connected writing to other areas of the curriculum:

> If an idea for creative writing came from a story, if we were reading and some thought came out of the story, I'd ask the children to follow up on it from the story. I would read a poem, a lot of poetry reading, and have them write about a similar subject. If the poem was Langston Hughes' "Dreams," then they had to write a poem about dreams that they have had. If we were talking about something in social studies, I might have them write a poem about the world as a melting pot. . . . It was all sparked by something we were doing or it was by specific subjects.

Even at the beginning of her involvement in the Writing Project, Elma was clearly committed to writing as an essential part of the curriculum. However, she recognized that

she had been the one who had been in charge of selecting topics for students to write about and the person who connected the topics to the curriculum. One of the striking changes for her, which she became aware of, was the issue of who was in control of the topics. She reflected upon her previous teaching by saying, "You know, I forced a lot of children into writing my ideas and my subjects" (Wave 1).

Early in her involvement with the Writing Project, Elma became aware that she was the one in control of topic choice. This awareness became deeper as she continued working with students; it continued to be an issue that she had not totally resolved. She expressed a desire to work on listening to children and developing a less directive approach with students: "I think I need to learn . . . the right demeanor, I suppose. A softer, gentler type of approach to listening to the children."

Although Elma had considered the issue of control throughout her involvement, it seemed to be an issue that she was still working on. In Wave 1, Elma focused on topic choice as an indicator of who was in control; she seemed comfortable with changing this aspect of her teaching. Yet, she wanted to work on developing a style in which she did not take over the student's writing but was more willing to let the child lead in the discussion of his or her text. Elma grappled with students making choices about topics and reflected on being more sensitive to students' work. She started to change her view of the teacher-student relationship, seeing the teacher's role as supporting children and finding the right words and demeanor to allow students to talk about their work. The student's role was to take the lead in topic choice and interaction.

Emily. In contrast to Erica and to some extent Elma, Emily had been concerned with student control over topic since the beginning of her involvement in the Project. In Wave 1, when speaking about how to handle a student who was unwilling to write, Emily said, "I'd leave him alone for awhile because I think that he needs to feel that he's in control." She saw the issue of control as a major one in the Writing Project and wanted to provide students with opportunities to be in control of their own processes. "I think it's a matter of ownership in the writing workshop. The kids have total control over what they're writing, total control over changing it, total control over topic." Through the experience of listening to literature and writing their own texts on a daily basis, she believed students would understand writing and become skilled writers. Students would learn to control their own processes over time as they gained experience with writing.

Although Emily remained committed to the idea of student control, she found that she needed to intervene more in their writing. Through reflecting about how she engaged in writing conferences with students, she found that she needed to take a more active role

with students: "To be more directive with kids. I think that was my biggest problem—that I wanted to give them so much ownership that I was afraid to intercede when it is really necessary at this age of children" (Wave 3).

Unlike the other two teachers who increased the amount of control they wanted students to have, Emily believed she needed to provide more modeling. Instead of just listening to students and asking questions, she found it necessary to provide suggestions and to give examples from her own experience. Emily refined her perceptions about the teacher-student relationship to include a more active role of the teacher than she had previously thought necessary.

Goals for Writing

Teachers' responses to the questions about goals reflected their changing conceptions of the purposes of writing.

Erica. In Erica's Wave 1 interview, she had difficulty describing purposes for writing; she had not really thought of writing as purposeful prior to her involvement in the Workshop. Writing was "doing poetry" and making decorative booklets. There was no mention of communication, audience, or expression of ideas. Reflecting on her past teaching, Erica explained:

> I did a lot of poetry then because it seemed to be shorter. I could read them faster and I would set up . . . a routine where I would give them the assignment or topic and they would write a poem. I would have them line up and I would check them as I lined them up and [have them] sit down from there and basically decorate a background for it. If the poetry was about autumn, they would make a leaf and paste their writing right on top of the leaf. . . . So my booklets would be very—What is the word?—decorative. If it was a booklet about transportation it was shaped like a car, so that if they opened it, each page was shaped like a car.

Erica's conception of writing consisted of routines in which children were assigned topics, teachers checked for spelling and grammatical mistakes, and children decorated their pictures to go with their writing.

Over time, however, Erica developed a sense of purpose for writing as a communicative process. In Wave 3, she said:

> This year I found making writing purposeful. I mean you're not writing just to shove it in a closet or shove it in a drawer and forget about it forever. To

> actually share the writing, what it is to write a piece about a family member and give it to them as a present. Giving somebody a piece of writing you know to make them feel better, an appreciation of the writing itself, or making our article become worthwhile for a magazine.

For Erica, writing had taken on meaning as a social process through which others share their intentions, their experiences, and their beliefs. Writing was no longer a dead-end process in which the teacher assigned a topic and students wrote a few sentences, then cut out the picture of the topic, and pasted the words on the sheet. In her changing conceptions of writing, Erica established goals for her students. She wanted students to appreciate the "beauty, the uniqueness, . . . the storyline, patterns within literature, patterns within their own writing, clearness, expressiveness." Her goal was for students "to see their own piece of writing. Yes, stepping outside themselves and seeing another side or understanding their writing more clearly, their style, their method" (Wave 3).

Before her involvement with the Writing Project, Erica had little conception of the purposes of writing. Her belief matched what Freedman and others (1987) have called the product approach to writing, emphasizing mechanics and the written form of writing. Erica came to embrace a process approach to writing in which she focused on ideas, clarity of written expression, and the importance of the writer communicating with an audience. Her conception also included an aesthetic appreciation for literature.

Elma. Like Erica, Elma changed her conceptions about the goals of writing through the course of her involvement with the Writing Project. At the beginning of her involvement, Elma believed that the most important goal was to get students comfortable with writing: "I feel that the goal is getting comfortable writing. . . . I think that they remember being happy in my class and feeling comfortable and at ease" (Wave 1).

By Wave 2, she had more developed goals related to literature and writing. Her focus was on getting students to express themselves because of the importance of writing in life. She said:

> I think just that to be able to take what's in your mind and put it on a piece of paper in the best cohesive way possible. . . . And I think that in general children have got to be encouraged to be able to express themselves in writing. . . . You have to communicate all the time with letters, applications; I mean the practicality in life to be able to write college essays or whatever.

At this point, Elma saw writing as functional. Learning to write was not only for personal expression but served a practical communicative function. As a reflection of the

communicative importance of writing, Elma often alluded to the role of the reader in her responses to text. She wanted students to recognize that a particular person would be reading the piece of writing and that the reader influenced how the writer should think about changing or revising the piece. She especially wanted children to think about what the author had in mind when writing the story.

Besides seeing writing as functional, Elma found that literature was essential in teaching children how to write. With her students she had been exploring many different genres such as personal narratives, autobiographies, fairy tales, and poetry. Every child became familiar with many books in a particular genre because, "In order to write good literature, you really have to know good literature."

Elma's goals included getting students to understand aspects such as development of character, authors' points of view, and as appreciating beautiful imagery. Her focus in Wave 2 was to

> help them to put their words down on paper, to be able to revise simple language and make it more beautiful, to understand how to replace a tired verb, to focus and eliminate all the nonsense, get rid of the stuff that the reader doesn't want to hear in order to get to what the reader does want to hear, to pay attention to detail, to take pride in your work, and take pride in the finished product.

In Wave 3, Elma's goals were not only to take into consideration the reader but also to get students to think about themselves and their world. She moved beyond seeing writing as functional to viewing writing as a means of empowerment. Writing became a tool not only to communicate with another but also to empower the writer to come to a deeper understanding of the world and the writer's relationship to the world. In talking about what she wants to accomplish, Elma responded:

> I think I'm just trying to get children to write. I think I'd like to have a generation of children who, if somebody said, "Okay, you're going to write now," they don't say, "Oh God"—a generation of people who can take feeling and emotion and bring it from their hearts to their heads, and be able to write as a means to understand themselves and their places in the world.

She found that writing could empower children to find out what they are curious about and answer questions about the world. Through writing children were empowered:

> I think it really empowers the children. I mean I think the best thing we can do for them is to let the children know that they have a hand in their own education, that they have power, and that they can spend time during the day writing about and doing something that really is meaningful to them. I think it's putting education back in the hands of children. It's really giving them a say in what they do.

Elma elaborated and extended her goals for writing. She did not discard one set of goals and replace them with a new set, but rather broadened her conceptions. Data from Wave 3 reflected a shift and development in her ideas, not a radical departure nor a mere addition of more goals. In Wave 3, she still wanted children to be comfortable with writing, but that goal grew into something more. Elma found that students could be empowered by being able to write; students could be active participants in their own education. Not only did writing serve a communicative function, but writing could help students to change the status quo.

Self-expression, a goal in Wave 2, was not lost either. She encouraged students to use writing as a tool to express themselves to a particular audience; yet writing went beyond communication to help students see their relationship to the rest of the world. Writing was a means of understanding oneself and the world as well as a means of communication.

Emily. From the beginning, Emily's goals for students included having them enjoy reading, appreciate literature, and take risks in their own writing. In Wave 1, she used an example of getting students to understand differences between basal text-type books and skillful authors: "I want them to be able to appreciate good literature and know the difference between something like, 'Dan runs. Can you run?'—the difference between that and Roald Dahl or E. B. White. I mean, to hear it, to feel it."

Understanding different authors' voices and styles was an important goal, but the main goal was for students to enjoy reading. In Wave 2, Emily responded: "[The goal is] that they learn to enjoy reading, that they learn to appreciate the sound of literature. And I think above all that they learn that it's safe to take risks." For Emily, the goals of appreciating literature and taking risks were related, as evidenced by her comments: "In order for them to enjoy reading and want to do it more, they have to learn to take risks and I hope that I can create a nonjudgmental atmosphere where I can accomplish this because they [the goals] all really tie together."

The goals of reading and writing were linked in Emily's discussions about her views of writing. Good literature was a model for students' own writing that she hoped students would emulate after continual exposure. Through an understanding of literature she hoped

children would be able to learn about their own writing and become critics. In Wave 3 Emily said, "So my overall goal would be to get them to hear, listen to, and acknowledge good literature and then start to be able to model by themselves and to realize from there, just develop a kind of critical judgment of their own writing."

Emily demonstrated consistency in her goals toward writing. She linked reading and writing and believed that students would learn through continual exposure to literature. Emily seemed to have established the direction in which she wanted to take children; her view stayed consistent. Unlike Erica who radically changed her goals, Emily began with the goal to connect reading and writing and remained consistent.

Changes in Pedagogy

The three teachers also changed their views of how to approach writing with students. Although each of the teachers changed in some way, some teachers' change was more marked than others.

Erica. At the beginning of her involvement with the Writing Project, Erica's way of teaching writing consisted of routine assignments, such as providing students with practice using ditto sheets and having students do projects and make booklets. She emphasized form in her responses to the grammatical questions. Erica believed that students "ought to understand what form to use" (Wave 1). Her methods of teaching students the conventions consisted of having students make booklets and write sentences to practice using apostrophes.

In Wave 2, conventions were still important to her. She suggested that she would have students list objects and use cards containing particular sentences to learn how to use conventions. At this point, Erica still taught conventions outside of the context of children's writing and she developed particular lessons to teach mechanics. In Wave 3 Erica still talked about teaching apostrophes outside of the context of students' writing. In thinking about writing conventions, she did not adopt the aspect of the Project that encouraged teachers to use students' writing to teach conventions.

However, changes in pedagogy were more visible through Erica's discussion of organization. Whereas in Wave 1 Erica responded that she taught organization through having students learn outlines using Roman numerals or having sheets with questions about stories for students to organize, she emphasized having the students demonstrate understanding of sequence through revision in Wave 3. In Wave 1, Erica responded:

> I would introduce it [organization] with letter writing, business letters, friendly letters. . . . I would rather give them a piece of paper that has questions on

> it: tell me something you liked from the story. . . . I like to go over how each paragraph generally has a topic sentence and see if it is something as simple as handing out a couple of ditto sheets with different paragraphs, reading them and talking about your topic sentence. It helps the children to stick to the main idea.

Erica did make a transition to teaching organization through revision rather than ditto sheets. In Wave 2 she discussed the need for students to break down main ideas and to put things together into sensible paragraph structures. She suggested teaching a minilesson to the whole class and having students work on organization of a text: "I would use the board and have a messy type of story already written out, then have children help me to rewrite it using paragraph formation." Her strategies for working with students would depend upon "what this author wants to say." She would try to talk to the students and get them to talk about what they were seeing in their own writing.

Topic sentences were not important in Wave 3 data and she did not use ditto sheets to give students practice in identifying main ideas in stories. Instead, she focused on the sequence of events within students' own writing. When asked how she would work with students on organization in Wave 3, she said, "[By] rereading it, having them reread me their piece. . . . [I] have them look for their thoughts, seeing if their thoughts are in some kind of sequence or pattern." She would have students work with their own pieces, organizing their own writing, rather than giving them a practice sheet.

Although her strategy of talking with the student was consistent throughout the waves, there were some subtle shifts. The more subtle shift in her pedagogy can be seen through her responses to the Jessie story from the interview. In Wave 1, Erica responded that she would talk to the student and get the student to talk about what he was seeing in his own writing. In Waves 2 and 3, she also suggested use of the strategy of getting the student to talk about his writing, but the nature of the questioning changed. In Wave 1, when she asked how she would respond to Jessie's text, she answered:

> I would ask him if he would want to put any more ideas in his work—maybe another thing that he did at the picnic. . . . See I would get into asking him questions [like] Where did you go on the picnic? Just simple questions that he did not include.

In Wave 2, she would still ask him questions, but initially the questions or responses would come from him: "Okay, I would try to get questions from him. . . . It seems like the

important thing about this story would be the picnic. And that is what I would say, 'Is that what you want to say?'"

In Wave 3, Erica wanted the student to talk about his own writing: "I would try to get him to talk about the piece and what he's seeing in his own writing. I would say, 'What do you feel about your writing?'" The shift here was away from Erica, as the teacher, coming in with her own agenda and asking students many questions toward an approach in which she tried to get students to talk about their writing and their intentions first. Erica discussed how she would base the rest of the conversation on what the student had focused on.

Elma. Although Elma's approach to pedagogy in writing did not change as significantly as Erica's during the course of her involvement with the Writing Project, her responses to the texts and to the students became much more context-dependent. Her views about the role of grammar and how she would teach grammar remained consistent throughout the three data points, yet her responses increased in depth and she was more certain of her views. For instance, in Wave 1 she responded that she would not teach grammar to her students. By Wave 3, she stated quite strongly that

> you *can't* teach grammar to kids. I really mean it, I don't think you can. I don't think you can teach grammar to elementary school kids. . . . I think the teaching of grammar really should be left to the high school.

Whereas in Wave 1 she said she would not teach grammar but would insist that the correct form be used in the final draft, in Wave 3 her entire emphasis was whether the grammatical form affected the meaning. If the sentence did not cause confusion for the reader, then there was no reason to alter it to conform to conventions.

This focus on the reader's understanding reflected Elma's increasing emphasis on teaching conventions and organization within the context of the student's work. In the beginning of her involvement in the Project, her pedagogical responses were less contextualized and more rule-driven; that is, she had in mind certain grammatical rules that students should know and then taught them to apply those rules to their texts. This is most clear in the series of questions about organization. In her initial responses to the organization questions, she focused on teaching students to organize through games, through more practice with sequencing, and through techniques such as brainstorming:

> I think that I would probably play lots of games. I would play lots of sequencing games. I would take lots of different paragraphs step by step

> [where] different things happened and I would let the children put them in proper sequence . . . and then they would understand that ideas belong together in a paragraph.

In Wave 2, Elma believed in using techniques like time lines and outlines to get students to organize their writing, but these were to be revised later on after the student had written a first draft. When she answered the questions about would she teach organization to children she said:

> Oh, absolutely, absolutely! I think what I would try to do is have them do a time line or some kind of technique before they write so that they know exactly where they're going. I try to encourage kids not to start writing their stories until they know where they're going. And then if it changes as the story evolves, that's okay to go back and change it.

By Wave 3, Elma's concern for organization was oriented toward the reader and what would facilitate clarity for the reader. She would also teach organization within the context of the student's particular text:

> [I would say to the student], Which one of these things do you think should go first? Which one should go second? Which ones should go third? What does somebody need to know? What information do they need to know before they can understand the other information? . . . I think you need to teach them how to revise, techniques of revision—to go back and look over things and move them into the proper order. And I think that that's a question of helping them to see the sequence of the way they want their pieces to go.

Elma's approach to pedagogy changed from being somewhat decontextualized, an orientation in which she might teach certain techniques to help students organize their writing, to an orientation in which she used techniques within the context of the student's own writing at the revision stage. Her concern for organization centered around the clarity of the development of events for the reader, rather than around a preordained, specific sequence.

The context-dependency of her conceptions of pedagogy and writing was reflected in changes in her thinking about responding to students' work. Her responses to both of the students' texts that were presented were consistent throughout the three data points. In the Jessie story, she consistently mentioned the student's lack of focus, the lack of selection of

a topic that seemed important to the child, and the lack of a sense of story in the piece. In the dolphin piece, she believed the research the student had done on dolphins to be excellent, yet found that the piece lacked organization.

Elma's method of responding to the student stayed consistent also. She would question him about what he really wanted to say and elicit from the student details about what happened to include those in revision. However, Elma became increasingly more concerned with the individual student. Her responses about how to grade the work as well as how to respond to the text were focused on the particular student and situation. For instance, in Wave 3 she said:

> I can't relate to writing anymore other than by knowing the children and having them in front of me and having them be part. Each child is so different now in the writing workshop. . . . The workshop is based more on your relationship with the child and what you know about the child. . . . I would need to know everything else that's come before it now. I mean I can no longer take a piece of writing and say okay this is your favorite composition on my favorite day of summer. . . . I can't any longer take something out of context.

Elma explained that to evaluate work or decide what were appropriate pedagogical strategies, she needed to know the student well and be familiar with many of the texts the student had written. If a student had limited English, for instance, her evaluation of the text would be different. She might respond to the child in a similar way, getting him or her to add details and to focus on a particular event, but her expectations for what the student would produce would be different.

Emily. One of Emily's significant changes in pedagogy was related to her approaches to teaching grammar. The evidence for the change is apparent in her discussion of the apostrophe and "none is" questions (see Appendix). In Wave 1 data, she was willing to have students use worksheets and practice using apostrophes in sentences. Her aim was to get students physically involved in learning apostrophes so that they would understand the idea of possession:

> I would probably do a lesson on it the same way that I do lessons on compound words and contractions. . . . Basically just drilling, going over it in different ways, following it up with worksheets, using it in sentences. . . . Oh some kind of game, a pantomime maybe with placards, yours and mine, taking articles that belong to people. . . . Possibly writing a little skit around that,

> using big cards with apostrophes . . . something with a lot of physical involvement, a lot of slapstick, a lot of fun, a lot of things that belong to them.

At the beginning of the year, Emily saw the learning of apostrophes as an important aspect of writing. Her teaching strategies were focused on getting students to understand the concept apart from their writing.

As Emily continued her participation in the Writing Project, her ways of approaching teaching apostrophes and the role of grammar changed. She would not teach apostrophes to the whole group, but would hold conferences individually with students; she would only work with those who were developmentally ready because she believed apostrophes had little meaning for young students. She discussed how she would handle the situation in Wave 2:

> A one-to-one conference with a child—those children, that I think were developmentally ready for this. I would find examples in literature, compare that to their own writing, see if they're able to follow through to edit at that point and then I would add it as one of the skilled tasks that they would be responsible for at that point.

Her justification for not placing a lot of emphasis upon apostrophes and other grammatical forms was that these issues no longer seemed important in the process of writing. She said in Wave 2:

> I don't know how important this really is. I think it's important for them to be aware of it intellectually, but in the grand scheme of education I don't think it is important in third grade. If they see that they are not communicating an idea to someone who's reading it, at that point it becomes important to them. . . . If they're able to communicate, there's no reason to correct that, and that's one thing I found with the writing process—if they are able to communicate.

By Wave 3, Emily believed that it was through reading and increased exposure to literature that students would come to understand apostrophes: "I trust that he is at some point going to realize through more reading . . . but no worksheets, I don't think. It [errors in punctuation] can be pointed out. . . . I always present it in the context of some text."

Emily demonstrated how she incorporated the writing process philosophy through a change from doing lessons about apostrophes using different materials to teaching apostrophes within the context of a student's text. She also demonstrated a shift in belief

that students could pick up what they needed to know about technical issues through examples from literature. Emily seemed to expect that students would learn more through reading and being exposed to good literature than through any other pedagogical techniques. This notion of learners being able to understand more and more on their own was reflected in her responses to the sequence of questions on organization.

In getting students to understand how to group ideas in sentences and paragraphs, Emily said that she would teach these in a traditional way in Wave 1 data: "I would give them examples. We would go over it. I would introduce it very traditionally. Probably have some Xerox sheets of paragraphs, show them a piece of writing that wasn't broken into paragraphs."

In Wave 2, Emily used the context of their own stories and pieces from literature that she read to them as the sources for teaching about organization. When asked how she would teach students to organize their writing, she said, "They need to do more reading, and hear more literature, and do more writing." If her approach to teaching organization were not successful, she would read to them more and specifically point out parts of a story:

> I would read to them more. I would be more obvious about pointing out structure in stories, make more of a concerted effort to point out sequencing, playing more games, tell me back the story, let's act out the story, what happened first, second, third.

After having experience with students thinking about organization within literature and their own texts, Emily was even more confident in her position about teaching organization through literature. She said in Wave 3:

> They work on that [organization within their own text] through listening to a lot of stories being read to them. I think that is the most successful way of teaching. They also get a lot of practice in hearing from an audience and sharing. That's one of the main things the kids pick up on—the organization of a piece. . . . Organization means making sense.

Emily moved toward a position in which she believed that students learned about organization through being exposed to it through their reading. This movement was consistent with her change away from using worksheets in teaching grammar. In the beginning of her work in the Writing Project she would use grammar worksheets and exercises in organization; however, by the end of the second year she took the position that she would never use worksheets but rather would use students' own work.

Discussion

The cases of three teachers' changing conceptions of writing and writing instruction suggest both similarities and differences among the teachers. The major similarity was that changes in the teachers' conceptions clearly reflected the influence of the Teachers College Writing Project. However, differences existed among teachers with respect to the features of the Project upon which they focused and the degree to which the teachers changed in relation to those aspects.

First, it is clear that the Project had an effect upon the philosophy of these three teachers. The teachers did not change in a haphazard, indeterminate manner, adopting just any new conception of writing and pedagogy. They changed in ways that were clearly tied to Project goals and to the philosophy of the Writing Project. All three teachers changed in the ways in which they viewed the teacher-student relationship. They were all concerned with the issue of the child being in control of the writing process. The three teachers also came to believe in at least one of the Project's definitions and goals for writing: writing as communication, writing as empowerment, or writing as connected to the reading process.

In terms of pedagogy, the teachers believed in revision as a process through which students can come to rethink and reorganize their writing. Grammar was viewed in the service of communication of ideas and contributing to the understanding of the reader. Literature was the vehicle for students to learn about writing and to gain an appreciation of reading and writing and the connection between them. Teachers moved toward the notion of responding to issues of content and mechanics within the context of children's writing, rather than using methods external to student writing. These are all features of the Writing Project that are evident in books written by workshop personnel (e.g., Calkins, 1983, 1986; Calkins & Harwayne, 1987), materials collected by NCRTE, and in interviews with Project personnel (NCRTE data).

While it is interesting to note the similarities among the teachers and their learning about the Project, it is also useful to discover in what ways they differed from one another. Although the teachers shared the view that students should have more control over writing, they differed in their specific ideas about how to achieve this control. Both Erica and Elma believed that they had to step back and encourage the student to express ideas or choose topics. In contrast, Emily found that she had to intervene more in children's writing than she had previously thought necessary.

The teachers shared the goal of allowing students control over writing but differed in the selections of goals on which to focus and their reasons for shifting control. Erica changed significantly from being without a goal to a belief that writing serves the purpose

of communication and that students should become critical readers of their own texts, whereas Emily had a consistent goal of wanting students to enjoy and appreciate reading and writing. Elma, in contrast, underwent more subtle shifts in which she altered her central conception of seeing writing as communication to seeing writing as a vehicle for empowerment.

Changes in views of pedagogy can most clearly be seen in the case of Erica, who initially was concerned with teaching children the form of writing by using dittos and other means outside of the context of children's writing. After involvement with the Project, she was less likely to use routines and dittos to teach writing. Emily, too, changed from teaching grammar through exercises to a belief that the teaching of grammar can only take place within the context of a student's text. Elma's change was less dramatic; she gained confidence in her earlier beliefs that the teaching of grammar should only occur within the context of a child's piece of writing. Her teaching became increasingly more oriented toward responding to the individual.

The teachers, then, selected different aspects of the Writing Project to emphasize. Changes occurred in their conceptions to different degrees. What explanation might there be for these differences? A variety of explanations could be provided from possible differences in training, to differences in classes and grade level, to differences in experiences with students and their effects upon teachers' conceptions. All of these are probably factors to some degree, but a more compelling argument is that teachers came to the Project with varying amounts of background knowledge and beliefs about writing. This background knowledge is an important factor in relation to what they subsequently learned in the training.

Erica had engaged students in little writing prior to her involvement in the Writing Project. She also had no experience with the Project prior to data collection. Her changes seem particularly dramatic because she went from holding quite traditional views to seeing writing as a communicative vehicle. Elma, however, had given students opportunities to write and had already had an opportunity to understand some of the purposes of the Writing Project in the Summer Institute. Emily, who had the most experience, having both taught literature courses and having an overview course four years previous to the Summer Institute seemed to change in less dramatic ways.

The similarities and differences among what the teachers learned in this study suggest two implications for staff development purposes: (a) Staff development programs can make a difference in what teachers learn and how they conceptualize writing; and (b) programs need to acknowledge the different starting points and differences in experiences of teachers.

The similarities in the direction in which teachers changed suggest that an intensive staff development program which involves teachers in extended workshops where teachers are writing themselves, as well as learning how to teach children, and which provides on-site demonstrations for teachers can influence how teachers think about writing.

Differences in the degree of change may suggest that changes in conceptions of pedagogy and conceptions of writing are related but that these changes do not necessarily occur simultaneously. Not surprisingly, different teachers understand and use ideas, philosophies, and materials in different ways. These difference may be something to highlight and build upon rather than discourage.

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